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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3227

January 26, 2011

The Honorable Janet Napolitano
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20393

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary
Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Re: The Peace Bridge Expansion Project

Dear Secretary Napolitano and Secretary LaHood:

President Obama's State of the Union address established very clear themes and goals for our country and the federal government. His remarks on increasing exports, repairing and modernizing our infrastructure, and finding new and creative ways to finance infrastructure all reiterated in my mind the importance of the Peace Bridge Expansion Project. I know you share the President's goals, and that is why I encourage you today to use all the tools you possess to make sure that in 2011, the environmental process on the Peace Bridge can finally come to a successful conclusion, allowing construction to commence.

The President has made a clear commitment to establishing a path to doubling American exports because it will create jobs and increase economic activity. The Peace Bridge project has, and should be seen to have, an important role in achieving that goal. Already the third busiest Northern Border crossing with Canada, our country's largest trading partner, more than \$30 billion in trade moves across the Peace Bridge every year, and that trade is linked to \$227.4 billion in economic generation at companies that do business in our country, supporting 1 million jobs. Businesses in Western New York and around the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic regions benefit from this trade linkage. If we are to actually achieve the ambitious goals set forth by the President, we need to increase capacity at the Peace Bridge to increase economic opportunity and create jobs.

Another theme in the President's speech was the importance of rebuilding our infrastructure to increase American economic productivity. The Peace Bridge was constructed with three lanes. On many days, functional traffic movement is decreased to one lane because of the high volume of freight crossing the border. The Peace Bridge expansion project would add four lanes at this crossing, availing people to move across the border with considerable ease. Buffalo and Western New York have long struggled to turn around our economy even though the region is situated next to the second fastest growing region in North America, southern Ontario. In order to unlock the untapped economic potential of this mega-region, and to inject new economic life into Buffalo and Western New York, this new infrastructure project is essential.

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The Peace Bridge expansion project would also be an excellent candidate for the unique competitively-based financing mechanisms the President mentioned to fund new infrastructure projects. Unlike many infrastructure projects, the Peace Bridge has several built-in revenue sources – tolls and duty free shops – that decrease the barriers to entry in attracting private investment. In addition, the return on investment should be obvious given significant economic investment opportunities that will logically be unlocked by a capacity expansion. Given the strategic economic return of strong projects like the Peace Bridge, we should be working at full speed in finding ways to finance them.

Given all this promise and all this potential, we know that the hurdles toward getting to construction lie within your agencies. We know the government review process is arduous and deliberative, and that the NEPA process has considerable merit, but if your agencies cannot work collaboratively to take accountability for a project that is clearly within the strong economic interest, not just for Buffalo and Western New York, but for the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic regions of our country, the results could be devastating in the economic opportunities lost. I urge you to assert leadership roles in this process so that we can finally make this project a reality this year.

I look forward to working with you on this project. Thank you for the work that you do.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian Higgins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Brian" and last name "Higgins" clearly legible.

BRIAN HIGGINS
Member of Congress